

Good Morning/Afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee today. My name is Andrea Barton Reeves. I am a child protection attorney and program director for Lawyers for Children America. LFCA is an organization that trains attorneys to represent abused and neglected children. ~~[I am also adoptive parent of a beautiful little boy who is now eight years old, and speak about this bill both as an advocate for children and on behalf of my child.]~~

Today, I ask the Committee to reconsider passage of Proposed Bill No. 174.[an act that would require any parent whose parental rights have been terminated to continue to be responsible for paying child support payments as if their parental rights had not been terminated.]

Although I respect the Committee's position regarding the bill, I am concerned that in its inception and application, the bill is contrary to the best interests of children and the child welfare system for several reasons.

First, as a practical matter, it is unlikely that the State of Connecticut collecting any meaningful amount of money from parents whose rights have been terminated. This population of parents are often of very

limited financial means and are, in general, a transient population.

Therefore, the State is far more likely to expend greater resources in finding the parents and pursuing orders of contempt against those who have no means to pay, than it will ever see in collected funds.

Second, the bill, as proposed, may be unfair to parents whose rights have been terminated by agreement. It is true that some parents' rights are terminated because they have failed to improve their lives in a time frame that would allow them to be effective parents to their children. But there is also a population of parents who love their children deeply, but simply cannot overcome the circumstances that led to their children's removal. These parents make a heart-wrenching decision to **voluntarily** terminate their parental rights and must live with that decision for the rest of their lives. To compel these parents to make support payments, after making such a decision, simply prolongs their emotional anguish for years.

Similarly, the bill as proposed would have a chilling effect on parents' willingness to enter into voluntary termination agreements. Parents often enter into these agreements because they wish to avoid

trial and achieve some finality in what is very often a long, emotionally draining travail with the Department of Children and Families. If parents learn that their case is really never over because they have to pay support payments even after termination, it is very likely that many more parents will choose to go to trial rather than agree to settle, even if they have little chance of prevailing at trial. This will drive up the costs of litigating child protection matters substantially, and divert legal and judicial resources to unnecessary trials where settlement may have been possible.

Finally, compelling parents to pay support after TPR will also have a chilling effect on achieving permanency for children and discourage the recruitment of pre-adoptive families and guardians. Many prospective foster and adoptive families agree to parent children in care in part because they are assured that they will have as little contact as possible with the biological family. Parents who are forced to pay support may make demands to see the children for whom support is being paid and may make efforts to locate the children after termination. [Although I have only anecdotal evidence, I do know of circumstances

where terminated parents have tracked down adoptive parents and the adopted children, much to the dismay of the families.] I am concerned that with an obligation to pay support, terminated parents may feel that they have a right to have contact with children they are supporting, even if they have no legal standing to do so.

If prospective adoptive families and guardians have no assurance that they may end all contact with the biological parents, if that is deemed to be in the children's best interests, this bill will adversely impact efforts to recruit and retain adoptive families and guardians.

While I deeply respect the Committee's desire to hold parents accountable for their children in care, termination cases are far too nuanced to be addressed by a bill that treats every case in the same manner. Therefore, I respectfully ask the Committee to reconsider Proposed Bill number 174 and seek other means of support for children in care.